

71.2009 085. 04219

Abraham Lincoln's Political Career through 1860

Visits to Fort Wayne, IN

Excerpts from newspapers and other sources

From the files of the
Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection

WOMAN 100 YEARS OLD

TRAIN RIDE TO FORT WAYNE TO
HEAR LINCOLN AND DOUGLAS.

Remarkable Pioneer Who Has Out-
lived All the Old Residents of
Marshall County—Hasn't Had a
Doctor in Fifty Years.

(The Plymouth Democrat.)

The oldest person residing in Marshall county and probably in this section of the state, is Mrs. Lorenda Nyfong, who celebrates the one hundredth anniversary of her birth Monday. At present she is residing with her daughter, Mrs. August Welssert, twelve miles southeast of this city on the Leesburg road. Enjoying perfect health, with all of her senses excepting her sight intact, perfectly able to make her way about the homes of her children, and grandchildren, quite able to carry on a conversation, not only with her kin, but any stranger, and with a memory that would put a person younger by fifty years to shame, the case of this woman is most remarkable.

The secret of the wonderful longevity of Grandma Nyfong, is her great inherited vitality. She has not been visited by a physician in the past fifty years, and in her entire lifetime suffered only one serious illness. The loss of her sight, which although not complete, makes her unable to distinguish persons or colors, yet she is able to distinguish daylight from darkness, as the result of a lifetime spent in heavy reading, and needle work.

When Lorenda Watson was thirty-six years of age, she was united in marriage to John Nyfong, a resident of Marion county, Ohio. Her husband was thirteen years her junior. The couple lived in Ohio, for three years. Their occupation was farming a small tract which they rented from a landlord. At the end of this time the little farm was sold and the couple with two children, found themselves without a home. Upon the advice of

an uncle, they determined to come to Indiana. Accordingly a man with a wagon and team was employed, and the young couple set out for their "western" home. After eight days of travelling, over roads, good and bad, and some roads that were not roads, they arrived in Marshall county, and settled on a tract five miles east of Plymouth. This farm, consisting of eighty acres, they bought of the owner whose name was Dodge. He had originally secured it as government land. The date of the advent of the Nyfongs into Marshall county Indiana was 1848, only twelve years after the county was organized. The farm which they originally purchased still belongs to the descendants, and is now occupied by her son, James Nyfong and his family.

First Ride to Fort Wayne.

As Grandma Nyfong described Marshall county when she moved here, it consisted largely of woods and unsettled districts. By far the bulk of residences and store buildings were built of logs. The Indians were plentiful, and roads poor and hard to pass. All of the remaining years of her life, she spent on the farm east of this city, until a few weeks ago, since when she had been visiting with her other relatives. The first ride

which she ever took on a railroad train was made during the campaign of 1860, during the time of the famous debates between Douglas and Lincoln were being held. In this year, with her husband, Mrs. Nyfong went to Fort Wayne, to hear Douglas speak.

Her Descendants.

Mrs. Lorenda Nyfong now has 49 direct descendants living. These are composed of three children, 16 grandchildren, and 30 great grandchildren. The children are, Martha L. Welssert, three miles west of Bourbon, James Nyfong, five miles east of Plymouth, and Joel Nyfong, who resides in north Plymouth.

Mrs. Welssert has seven children, who with their children and residences are as follows: Lorenda Riddle, Walnut township, Marshall county, ten children, Minnie Payne one and one-half miles north of Inwood, two children; William resides with his parents, three miles west of Bourbon, two children; George, Hamlet, Ind., one child, and Edward, Hamlet, no children.

James Nyfong has two children, they are, Lorenda Mann, five miles east of Plymouth, she has no children; John Nyfong, five miles east of Plymouth, four children.

Joel Nyfong has seven children, their residences and children are as follows: Lorenda J. Wolfert, south Plymouth, two children; Dollie B. Drake, seven miles east of Plymouth, two children; Israel A. Nyfong, south

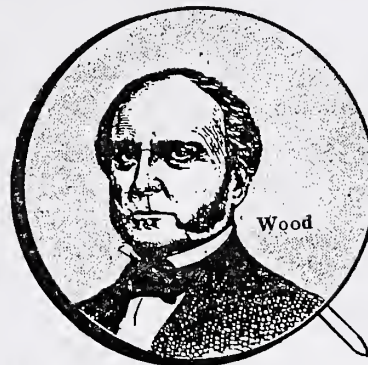
Plymouth, no children; Martha A. Barber, Fort Wayne, two children; Merle Nyfong, not married, and Pearl Mitchell, are twins, the latter resides at Syracuse, Ind. and has one child and Mary Jane Nyfong, aged eighteen, who resides with her parents in north Plymouth. This completes the long line of descendants to date. There are forty-nine from this centenarian alone. If her seven brothers and sisters did as well, there would be a total of 392 descendants from the John Watson, who came from Connecticut to Ohio, sometime about the time of the war

Merle Nyfong, not married, and Pearl Mitchell, are twins, the latter resides at Syracuse, Ind. and has one child and Mary Jane Nyfong, aged eighteen, who resides with her parents in north Plymouth. This completes the long line of descendants to date. There are forty-nine from this centenarian alone. If her seven brothers and sisters did as well, there would be a total of 392 descendants from the John Watson, who came from Connecticut to Ohio, sometime about the time of the war of 1812.

POLLS APART

Fort Wayne's great and heated elections

The coming of elections marked Allen County's change from frontier outpost to settled community. It happened in 1824, when Allen County's founding fathers gathered in Ewing's Tavern, at Barr and Columbia streets, to select one another for various offices. Five years later, the village citizens assembled, debated, voted to incorporate Fort Wayne as a town, and elected an assessor, treasurer, tax collector, marshal and street supervisor. In this primitive fashion, Fort Wayne was governed for 11 years. Then things got very strange and interesting.

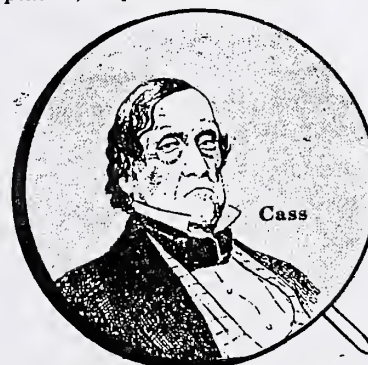


First elected, first to quit

When Fort Wayne was incorporated as a city in 1840, elections were promptly held and George W. Wood was chosen as the first mayor.

Wood was born in 1808 in New York state and came to Fort Wayne by way of Ann Arbor, Mich., where for a time he studied law. But he gave up the legal profession to join Thomas Tigar, the founder of the Fort Wayne Sentinel, as the town's second newspaperman. Wood soon owned the newspaper, and he bought another, the Fort Wayne Times.

He was elected to serve a second one-year term as mayor in 1841, but half-way through the year he begged the Council to allow him to return to his private affairs. At this early date, there was little that was political, except on national issues.



Testing political waters

National political campaigning came to Fort Wayne in 1843 when the great Wabash and Erie Canal was inaugurated. July 4 was the appointed grand day for dedicating the canal, then open all the way from Toledo to Lafayette. Picnics, barbecues and parades were planned, and letters of congratulations poured in, most notably from such great men of the day as Daniel Webster, President Martin Van Buren, Henry Clay and Gen. Winfield Scott. But the highlight of the doings in Fort Wayne was the appearance of Gen. Lewis Cass, the main speaker and current candidate for the 1844 Democratic presidential ticket.

Here was the stump-campaigner full of sonorous and weighty speeches, ready to take advantage of the great gathering of people from all over the region. He was a

Westerner and knew well how to stir fellow frontiersmen. Cass was a very large man in every respect. A notable commander in the War of 1812 and in the Indian campaigns afterward, he was military governor of Michigan Territory from 1813 to 1831.

Scores of canal boats from every Midwestern port were gaily festooned and tied three deep along the shore and docks of Columbia Street. Lanterns were hung everywhere. Cass arrived by canal boat that morning, and before hundreds of well-wishers gathered along the banks he started to cross the gangplank to shore when a local poet began to hold forth with some grandiloquent verse in honor of the general. Cass, his eyes set on the poet, stepped right off the gangplank and into the fetid waters of the canal, to the delight of most and the horror of some. Undaunted, Cass dried off at Allen Hamilton's home on Lewis Street, and managed to attend the afternoon activities at the Swinney Homestead. The crowd, gathered there in the thousands, thoroughly enjoyed his two-hour address—even those who could not hear the general, for they were content to cheer at the frequent firing of the old cannon taken from a British ship in the War of 1812. (Today, this cannon stands at the entrance to Historic Fort Wayne.) Still, it is said, the humiliation of his canal dunking haunted his candidacy and had a hand in his failure to gain the Democratic nomination. (Cass, however, was the party's nominee in the election of 1848; he went down to defeat against Whig and Mexican War hero Zachary Taylor.)



No log-splitters need apply

The most notable campaign to come to Fort Wayne in these early years was that waged for the presidency in 1860 between Abraham Lincoln and Stephen A. Douglas. Lincoln only briefly stopped in Fort Wayne—at 1 a.m. in February, 1860—in order to change trains. He was on his way to New York, where, two days later, he made the famous "Cooper Union" speech that marked a major boost in his bid for the presidency. Fort Wayne, in any case, was decidedly anti-Lincoln in sentiment. Even the Republican Dawson Daily News, remarking on Lincoln's brief exposure to Fort Wayne, said "Ole Abe looked as if his pattern had been a mighty ugly one."

The favorite in Allen County and Fort Wayne was Douglas, the Illinois senator known as the "Little Giant," who arrived here Oct. 2 amid noisy evening celebrations.

His way to the Rockhill House, on the western outskirts of town (where, today, St. Joseph's Hospital stands facing Main Street), was lined with cheering, torch-waving well-wishers. Many regarded him as the country's savior from civil war because of his non-interventionist policies regarding Southern slavery.

A huge sawed log, meant to represent Lincoln, the "Railsplitter of the Sagamon," was thrown into the St. Marys as a challenge to the "Black Republicans."

Douglas, in appreciation, came out on the balcony of the Rockhill and made a short speech to his supporters. A hue and cry went up — "To the courthouse!" — and hundreds streamed back into town and burned an effigy of Lincoln in front of the new courthouse.

The next day, at mid-morning, a huge parade was formed for Douglas. It took two hours for all to pass the viewing stand at the end of Main Street. Marching clubs from surrounding towns and counties attended, "each man in a hickory shirt and glazed cap." Four brass bands and several drum and fife corps also marched. Old Peter Kaiser, tall and portly and beloved as a pioneer character, marched proudly with his famous "scrapbook" in hand.

But the Republicans in town were not to be silenced in all of this. A great haywagon — with a likeness of Old Abe splitting rails riding on top — mysteriously lumbered into the middle of the Democrats' parade from some alleyway, pulled by stubborn oxen. The only way the "Democracy of Allen" could get the offending float out of the way was by pouring salt on the roadside to attract the animals off the parade route.

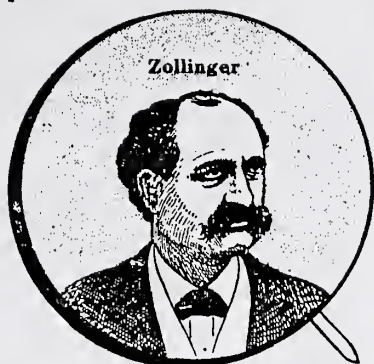
At the meeting place, a natural amphitheater between the ends of Main and Berry streets, along today's Thieme Drive, Douglas addressed his supporters: "Let me ask you," he exhorted after reading Lincoln's recent assertion that the nation could not exist half slave and half free, "why cannot this nation endure forever as our fathers made it, divided into free states and slave states, with the right on the part of each to have slavery as long as it chooses, and to abolish it when it pleases? . . . Why cannot we allow the new states and the new territories to do the same thing?" With lines so clearly drawn over such an emotional issue, it is evident why the country, including Allen County, was in turmoil in 1860.

The newspapers estimated the crowd to have numbered 60,000. More torchlight parades and a band concert followed the day's events. Commenting on the events, the editors of the pro-Republican Dawson Daily News said the "vulgarity and noise kept up on the streets . . . showed that whiskey was doing much more for him (Douglas) than he can do for himself. It don't take much sense, knowledge or gentility to be a Democrat."

While Allen County and Fort Wayne voted Democratic on election day — as they were to do on every occasion until 1904 — Douglas lost the national election.

So it went again in 1864, when Lincoln ran for a second term. Again, Allen County voted heavily against Lincoln, whose Democratic challenger was Gen. George McClellan.





Statehouse fun and games

Local politics long ago? You could easily term it rough and tumble.

Consider the 1886 state congressional race between incumbent Robert Lowry and James B. White, an immigrant storekeeper. Mudslinging was the norm.

White eventually won, but Lowry appealed — unsuccessfully — to have the election nullified on the grounds that White, a Scotsman, was ineligible because he was not a naturalized citizen. But White was a rare creature in Allen County politics of the time: He was a popular Republican trusted by the working classes. (His great-grandson, Edward White, incidentally, was the first man to walk in space.)

Or consider Col. Robert S. Robertson, a Civil War hero and local historian, who served in the state senate in the mid-1880s. When Lieutenant-governor Mahlon Manson died in 1886, the Republican-controlled legislature elected Robertson to the position, where he presided over that body. But the Democratic majority elected in '87 forbade Robertson from assuming his place as presiding officer when the legislature convened. Eventually, Robertson was forcibly ejected from the senate floor amidst the wildest hullabaloo it had ever seen, and the Fort Wayne man became the Republican martyr of "The Indiana Rebellion of 1887."

Local reform — as on the national scene — was the dominant theme of politics late in the 1880s. The campaign war cries of the Republicans, led by mayoral candidate Daniel L. Harding in 1889, called for strict enforcement of "Sunday Blue Laws," particularly with respect to the saloons that lined North Calhoun, Columbia and Main streets. The houses of ill-repute, which were also numerous in these blocks, were the target of the reformers. Harding was carried into office with a huge majority — the first Republican elected to office in Fort Wayne in 22 years.

Unfortunately, the zeal of the reformers upset more than saloonkeepers and denizens of the red-light district. Evidently, no distinction was made in the "Sunday Blue Laws" enforcement between those places and druggists, grocers, butchers, milkmen and restaurateurs, and these honest merchants were hauled into municipal court and fined along with the seamy citizens.

As a result, the Democrats, led by Charles Zollinger (who became a six-term mayor), were swept back into office in 1891.

Getting down and dirty

A century ago, one of the dirtiest of presidential campaigns was fought — between James G. Blaine and Grover Cleveland. On Oct. 20, 1884, James Blaine, the Republican candidate, came to Fort Wayne with his followers, William McKinley and Benjamin Harrison (both future presidents), and settled for a brief stay at the Aveline House.

Blaine represented Republicans at a time when that party had held almost complete sway over government for the nearly quarter-century after the Civil War. It was also a time of political scandal and corruption. Blaine — who wore the nickname of "The Plumed Knight" — was tarnished in the 1870s through a cache of letters that tied him to some very shady railroad dealings. Like the recording tapes of a later scandal, many of the letters mysteriously disappeared, creating a heavy cloud of suspicion.

Blaine, a senator from Maine, nonetheless won the 1884 Republican nod.

As a result, "Burn this letter" was chanted by Democrats.

But the Democrats had troubles, too. They nominated Grover Cleveland, the reforming governor of New York who opened the door to spectacular mudslinging when he publicly acknowledged that he had fathered an illegitimate child.

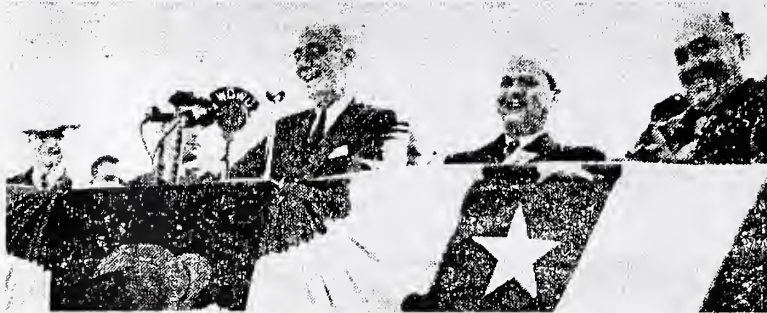
To this, the Republicans taunted, "Ma, Ma, where's my Pa, gone to the White House, ya, ya, ya."

When it became known that Blaine was coming to Fort Wayne, his supporters planned extravagant celebrations. His train was to arrive at 2:20 p.m., followed by a huge parade divided into five divisions, including railroad men with their lanterns, the Ladies' Glee Club and the Ladies' Broom Brigade, the uniformed "Plumed Knights," the Plug Hat Brigade, representatives from Toledo, Defiance, Van Wert and Warsaw, the Albion Magnet Club and ladies' bands from Ossian, Sheldon, Monroeville, Aboite Center and Hoagland.

But when, after all this, Blaine and McKinley tried to speak to the crowds gathered below their balcony at the Aveline Hotel, the Cleveland supporters shouted their chants mercilessly, and the candidate could not go on. He and McKinley, however, managed to get a carriage to take them up to the intersection of Calhoun and Lewis streets, where they succeeded at last in making a brief address.

Meanwhile, the Cleveland supporters organized an evening torchlight parade of their own. But when this march came into conflict with the Blaine gathering at Washington and Hanna streets, there were fist fights and much profanity before the police could break up the melee.

Allen County, as usual, voted Democratic, but this time their candidate won nationally, and for the first time since before the Civil War, the majority party in Fort Wayne had something to celebrate. North Calhoun Street became an open party; the saloons stayed open while men and boys used loud tin horns to sound the portly Cleveland into office.



FDR's 1944 Fort Wayne visit: From left, Gov. Henry Schricker, Roosevelt, Indiana Sen. Sam Jackson (a Fort Wayne native) and Democratic national committeeman Frank McKinney

Bryan's silver spoon

The most famous orator of the day and the darling of the rising Democratic Party late in the 19th century, William Jennings Bryan, came to Fort Wayne in 1896, shortly after winning his party's nomination. But Fort Wayne nearly missed him on this first visit.

In August, 1896, a young Fort Wayne Journal reporter named Harry Williams happened to be poking through the guest register at the Wayne Hotel when he found Bryan's name. The reporter promptly called upon "The Great Commoner" in his room, and then raced around town to rouse some leading (and embarrassed) Democrats to meet their new leader. Only two months before, in Chicago, Bryan had made his stirring challenge to the gold standard championed by the Republicans when he cried, "You shall not crucify mankind on a cross of gold," and won an enthusiastic following and the Democratic presidential nomination.

Some months after his first, furtive visit to Fort Wayne, Bryan was scheduled to come to town, and this time his party was ready with "Bryan Day" on Oct. 22 at Robison Park.

The weather was perfect when he arrived by train at 8:20 a.m., after having made rear-platform speeches in Ossian and Bluffton. People came from all over the countryside wearing silver ribbons, for the "Free Silver" battle-cry, and shouting "16 to 1" (referring to the low silver to gold ratio recently reached in the market, which had a terrible impact on laborers' wages). Some wags said "16 to 1" also meant 16 kids to one vote.

Sixteen white horses led in the parade through town, and these were followed by marching corps from New Haven, Angola and Leo, with a uniformed marching club especially noted for its grey derbies.

Bryan made his main speeches at Robison Park, and then at the Wayne Hotel. Even the opposition newspapers thought the crowd was the largest ever seen on Calhoun Street. Later, speeches were also made at the Princess Rink on Berry Street and at the nearby Saengerbund Hall.

Once again, Allen County voted Democratic and once again saw its favored candidate lose in the national election to the still dominant Republican Party.

Wilson vs. Fort Wayne

The elections held during World War I had a huge impact on traditional Allen County and Fort Wayne voting patterns.

Until this time, Allen County was a bastion of Democratic power. Called "The Democracy of Allen" in northern Indiana, it was called "Hog Allen" by downstate Republicans because of its size and political leanings.

Much of this heavy concentration of Democratic voting can be traced to the concerns and interests of the huge German-American population — nearly 80 percent of Fort Wayne and its countryside. These

folks clearly identified the protection of their family traditions, their jobs and their way of life in American society with the Democrats, who tended to be more liberal in matters of immigration, religious tolerance and the conditions of the working classes.

For these reasons and others, the predominately Democratic German Lutherans and German Catholics of Fort Wayne were jubilant when Woodrow Wilson was swept into power in 1912.

But, after World War I erupted in 1914, the increasing hostility of the Wilson administration toward the German Empire and the authorities' growing suspicion of naturalized German-Americans led to a dramatic shift in voting patterns in this area. From 1916 to 1932, Allen County and Fort Wayne went against a century of tradition and began to vote consistently Republican. With the exception of Franklin Roosevelt's first and second terms, the majority of area residents in both city and county have since voted Republican in national elections.

The end of a style

The mid-20th century brought television — and the end of an age-old political tradition: the rear-platform train campaign. Most memorable of these last rail tours for Fort Wayne came in 1944, when Franklin Roosevelt made his final campaign swing from aboard the rear of his private car on the Pennsy Line. Thousands turned out to see the war leader for the few minutes he could stop at the Baker Street Station to change trains. Referring to his deteriorating health, he confidently assured the crowd that "I'm perfectly able to take it as you are until we win." Then he acknowledged this community in exactly citing the way it was most important to the war effort: "You good people of Fort Wayne have first-hand knowledge of the great production job which has been done in this war and in this great railroad center; for example, you know how efficiently, how quickly railroads all over the United States have delivered goods."

But — as was the case with Lincoln — the war leader for whom most Allen County folks did not vote was nevertheless deeply respected for what he stood for. And what he had to say — in person, if for but a few moments — was of the greatest importance. For those who remember that visit to this day, it had the importance of a lifetime.

**Michael
Hawfield**



CITYSCAPES

Michael Hawfield is Executive Director of the Allen County-Fort Wayne Historical Society. His column is a monthly feature of Summit magazine.

Oct. 27, 1995/Nov. 10, 1995 News-Gazette



STAFF PHOTOGRAPH BY ANDREW JOHN

Civil War historian and author Marshall Krolick of Chicago, at right, discussed "The Chancellorsville Campaign" March 9.

Lincoln passed through

With our minds on the next presidential election in November, it is interesting to recall how Fort Wayne voted in the elections of 1860 and 1864.

Abraham Lincoln made a brief stop in the city at 1 a.m. Feb. 23, 1860, while his train was en route to New York City where he would deliver his Cooper Union Address four days later. It was a major step in the events that led to his election and the subsequent secession of the South.

A reporter observed, "'Ole Abe' looked as if his pattern had been a mighty ugly one."

His opponent that year, Stephen A. Douglas of Illinois, later made a speech from the balcony of the Rockhill House on Broadway and then led a giant parade down Main Street to the banks of the St. Marys River at the Wells Street bridge. A huge sawlog, intended to represent Lincoln, was flung in to the river as a gesture of ridicule and, later, local Democrats hung a straw effigy of Lincoln at the Allen County Courthouse.

Douglas beat Lincoln in the city, 3,224 to 2,552.

Four years later, Fort Wayne cast 4,932 votes for Lincoln's opponent, Gen. George B. McClellan, the Democrat, and 2,224 for the incumbent Lincoln."

— From "Twentieth Century History of Fort Wayne" by John Ankenbruck.

Paul Swinehart, who retired after 40 years as a conductor with the Norfolk and Southern Railroad. He is also treasurer of the group, which has 90 members, about half

The membership is diverse, including doctors, lawyers and truck drivers.

Some of the group's older members can recall talking to Civil



STAFF PHOTOGRAPH BY SAMUEL HO

Clockwise from top: a tintype of two Union teamsters; an Army belt replica; a Confederate revolver replica; a spyglass; a .58-caliber minieball; and the eyeglasses Brinkman uses in re-enactments. All items are from Brinkman's collection.

He is a window clerk at the Centennial Station branch of the Post Office. Another member, Don Gaff, a mail carrier at the same branch, has written two books on

Gaff will be one of the speakers at the Midwest Civil War Round Table Conference hosted by the local group April 24 and 25 at the Marriott Hotel. About 200 buffs

